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THE MADONNA AND THE CHRIST-CHILD



* * GERTRUDE E. HEATH * *

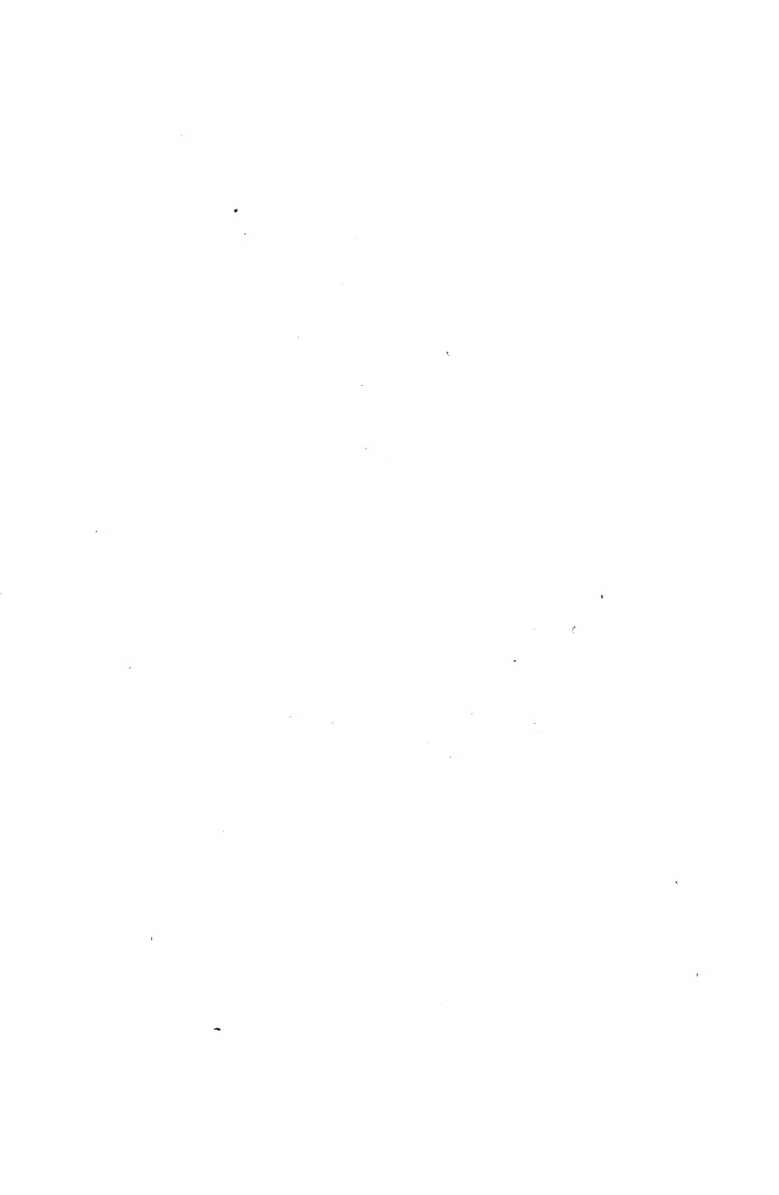


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Madonna and Child, by Carlo Dolce

THE MADONNA AND THE CHRIST-CHILD

LEGENDS AND LYRICS

GERTRUDE E. HEATH



BOSTON
RICHARD G. BADGER
THE GORHAM PRESS
1911

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7-2-11
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1911

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To S. H. H.



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MADONNA AND CHRIST CHILD

THE LEGEND OF THE PURPLE THREAD

My brethren, hear the legend sweet
Of Blessed Mary told,
Of how she spun the sacred veil
Of purple and of gold.

For some could spin the golden thread,
And some could spin the blue;
But one alone, sweet Mary dear,
Could spin the purple true.

O sweetly, softly, sat she down
And bent her gentle head,
And in and out and roundabout
She spun the purple thread.

For some could spin the golden thread,
And some could spin the blue;
But one alone, sweet Mary dear,
Could spin the purple true.

As in and out her shuttle spun,
The room seemed all aflame,
And there a holy angel stood
And called the Maiden's name.

For some can spin the golden thread,
And some can spin the blue;
But one alone, sweet Mary dear,
Can spin the purple true.

All wonderingly the Maiden said :

“Thy servant, what is she
That Thou should’st send, O Blessed Lord!
Thine angel down to me?”

“Ah, some can spin the golden thread,
And some can spin the blue;
But thou alone, sweet Mary dear,
Canst spin the purple true!”



The Annunciation, by Botticelli

THE HOLY NIGHT

They say that on the holy night
That saw the Christ-child's birth,
The very winds and waves were still;
No sound was heard on earth.
The moon and stars all feared to shine
Lest they disturb that night divine;
And every little wayside flower
Withheld its fragrance at that hour.

They say that on the holy night
That saw the Christ-child's birth,
The lion lay beside the lamb,
And peace came down to earth.
No evil deed was done that night,
And all was holy in God's sight;
Fire could not burn, or water drown,
When Christ was born in Bethlehem town.

They say that on the holy night
That saw the Christ-child's birth,
Like angels blest in silver drest
The stars came down to earth.
And ever since that holy night
The pure in heart may see the light.
For, Christmas eve, to Bethlehem town
God's shining angels still come down.

THE SONG OF MARY

“Sleep, little Son,
Most holy guest!
Sleep, little Son,
On Mother’s breast!”
So Mary sang in far Judea;
God sent His angels down to hear.

“Sleep, little Son!
Upon Thy brow
A thorny crown
I saw but now:
’Twas but a shadow,—sleep, my Child!”
So to her Son sang Mary mild.

“Ah, holy Babe
On Mother’s knee,—
In all my dreams
A cross I see!
God keep Thee safe, mine own dear Son!”
So Mary sang when day was done.

“Sleep, little Son,—
Ah, sleep, my Child!”
So to her Son
Sang Mary mild.



Madonna della Sedia, by Raphael

IN THE STABLE

When the breath of the cows and the oxen
Into silvery vapor is formed,
The peasant will say, Now this is the way
That the little Lord Christ was warmed!
For Our Lord was born in a stable,
And the cattle went down on their knees,
And they fought with death with their living breath,
(For Our Lady was like to freeze!)

O blest be the stable lowly
Where Mary the Mother divine,
And the little child of that Mother mild
Were warmed by the breath of the kine!
For, when breath of the cows and the oxen
Into silvery vapor is formed,
The peasant will say, Now this is the way
That the little Lord Christ was warmed!

THE CHILD AND THE LAMB

Ah, little white lamb, far away from the fold,
Dark, dark is the sky and the night groweth cold.
What have you seen as you wandered afar?—
Little child, little child, I have seen but a Star.
I follow my shepherd, he follows the Light:
We walk with God's angels this wonderful night!

Ah, little white lamb, as you wandered afar,
What news did you win of the wandering Star?—
I saw but a manger; I saw but a Child,
Who lay in the lap of His Mother and smiled.
I followed my shepherd, he followed the Light:
God's angels walked with us this wonderful night!

Ah! little white lamb, far away from the fold,
Never for you shall be darkness or cold:
You have looked on the Lord as you wandered
afar.—
Little child, little child, I have seen but a Star.
I followed my shepherd, he followed the Light:
God's angels walked with us this wonderful night!

CHRISTMAS MORN

Christmas morn, fair Christmas morn,
In His beauty Christ was born!
Years ago, ah! years ago!
Pure as lilies in the snow
Came the little Christ-child loving,
All the Father's kindness proving,
Fair and sweet, O fair and sweet!
Kiss the tiny hands and feet!
Toward the Shepherd of His sheep
Love can never be too deep!

Ring the bells, ah! ring the bells!
Tell it to the glades and dells!
How to-day—(O blithe to-day!—
Christ is worshipped far away.
Born within a lonely manger
Came this little joyous stranger.
Bow your heads, O bow your heads!
Radiant is the light He sheds!
Lay your offerings,—it is meet,—
Lowly at the Christ-child's feet!

Then rejoice, O then rejoice!
With a happy heart and voice
Let no tears, O let no tears!
Dim the brightest of our years.
Under earth the roots are growing

Buds for other summers' blowing;
Fair and sweet, O fair and sweet!
Kiss the tiny hands and feet!
Toward the Shepherd of His sheep
Love can never be too deep!

THE GIFTS OF THE MAGI

Three Wise Men came out of the East;
(And one he was Balthasár:)
And over the mountain and desert and sand
They followed the holy Star.
Caspar of Tarsus was one,
With his casket of jewels and gold;
And Balthasar carried the bitter myrrh
For the little Lord Christ to hold;
But Melchior carried the incense sweet,
To burn some day at the Christ-child's feet.

Three Wise Men came out of the East;
And they found but a new-born Child,
Who lay at rest on His mother's knee
And looked in her face and smiled.
Caspar of Tarsus was one,
With his casket of jewels and gold;
And Balhsar carried the bitter myrrh
For the little Lord Christ to hold;
But Melchoir carried the incense sweet
To burn some day at the Christ-child's feet.

Oh lowly they bowed them down,
Prone at the feet of their King;
Said Caspar: Listen, O holy Child!
These are the gifts we bring:
I, because Thou art King,
Have brought Thee jewels and gold;

And Balthasar bringeth the bitter myrrh
For the sorrow Thy life shall hold ;
But Melchoir bringeth the incense sweet
That ages shall burn at Thy holy feet.

Three Wise Men came out of the East ;
(And one, he was Balthasár :)
And over the mountain and desert and sand
They followed the holy Star.
Caspar of Tarsus was one
With his casket of jewels and gold ;
And Balthasar carried the bitter myrrh,
For the little Lord Christ to hold ;
But Melchoir carried the incense sweet
Forever to burn at His holy feet !



Madonna and Child, 'by Sassoferato

MATER AMABILIS

Mary Mother, sweet and mild
Bent above your little Child;
I can see your eyes grow dim
Gazing gravely down at Him.
Do you see the shadowed way
That your Boy must tread some day?

Yours He is: but yet in part:
(Once He nestled near your heart:)
All the world must claim Him now,
By the thorn-marks on His brow!
Ah! the weary shadowed way
That your Boy must tread some day!

Yours it is to guide His feet;
Make His baby pathway sweet.
For a time upon your knee
Shall His earthly kingdom be:
Then,—the weary shadowed way
That your Boy must tread some day!

Mary Mother, sweet and mild
Smiles upon her sleeping Child.
Well she knows the angels keep
Watch above the Christ-child's sleep.
Yet,—the weary shadowed way
That her Boy must tread some day!

WHEN JESUS WAS A LITTLE CHILD

When Jesus was a little child
Asleep on Blessed Mary's knee,
Do you suppose His Mother smiled
Just as my mother smiles on me?
For I have heard my father say,
All mothers smile the selfsame way;
That mother-love is all divine
Since Jesus lived in Palestine.

When Jesus lived in Galilee
He made some little birds of clay.
"Go, little birds of God!" said He;
And fast and far they flew away.
Ah, surely then His Mother smiled
And softly blessed her little Child.
I wish I had been there to see,
When Jesus lived in Galilee!

THE MIRACLE OF THE CORN

I

In a quaint volume by the monks of old,
There is a legend of Our Lady told:
How with the Holy Child she fled one morn
Past toil-worn laborers, as they sowed their corn.
And each man hastened from his work to see
Sweet Mary's Son, held fast upon her knee.
He plunged His fingers in the golden grain
And flung it to the furrows, like the rain.
And Mary said: "Blest shall thy harvest be;
For lo! my little Son has sowed for thee!
One seeks His life. Should Herod come this morn,
Say that we passed thee as thou sowed'st thy corn."

II

Blest was their sowing; soon there came a shower,
And a great miracle was wrought that hour.
For the grain sprouted; followed blade and root;
And, lo! the cornfield with its ripened fruit!
When Herod passed with all his mighty train,
There stood the laborers, gathering in their grain.
He raised his hand: "We seek a child, said he,
Like a young king he rides, and fair to see;
Perchance you met him on this busy morn?"
They said: "One passed us as we sowed our corn."
Then to their work. And Herod went his way,
And sought the Child no longer from that day.

THE MADONNA FLOWER

When Blesséd Mary walked the fields,
The little flowerets sweet
All breathed their fragrance out to her
And kissed her gentle feet.

And one she loved above the rest;
And alway from that hour
This little blossom has been called
The fair Madonna Flower.

How sweet to think the Holy Two
Have held the flowerets sweet!
Ah! to have been a blossom then,
To kiss those holy feet!



Madonna of the Pomegranate, by Botticelli

MARY OF THE MYSTIC EYES

O Mary of the mystic eyes,
What visions do you see,
The while you hold God's little Son
Asleep upon your knee?
"I see a cruel road, alas!
And angels weeping as they pass."

O Mary of the mystic eyes,
Lift up your gentle head!
What cruel road is this you see,
That weeping angels tread?
"Who walks this cruel road," said she,
Shall see God's Son upon the tree!"

O Mary of the mystic eyes,—
Thou Star across the Sea!
Earth's crown of sorrow has no thorn
That was not borne by thee!
"Above all others I was blest,
Who held God's Son upon my breast!"

THE MADONNA OF THE NAPKIN

Once in a monastery old
There lived a cook with a heart of gold.
He mixed the salad and baked the bread,
And ever a prayer in his heart he said:
"Blest, O Lord, be our daily food;
Guide my hand that I make it good!"
And the abbot said, as he coned his book,
"Praised be God for a prayerful cook!"

The chapel was bare; and the brothers old
Longed for a saint with a crown of gold.
And an artist came with his tools and all,
And he drew a saint on the chapel wall.
And the picture grew till it almost breathed
With its little circlet of bay enwreathed.
With a merry jest and a warm good day,
Gaily the artist went his way!

But he left behind him with jesting look
Just a napkin to give the cook.
And the cook unfolded: and there he saw
What filled the man with a wondering awe.
For painted clear on its surface white
A vision dawned on his wondering sight.

Out from the cloth looked the Holy Child
And the eyes of the Mother, Mary mild.
And the vision grew till the gathering gloom

Slipped away from the little room.

And the good cook fell on his knees and prayed:

“Blest be the bread that these hands have made!”

And the vision made answer: “Thy bread was
blest.

Who giveth with blessing, gives his best!”

THE LEGEND OF THE PALM

A little Child came riding
Across the sun-swept sands,
And the hearts of all of the world to be
He held in His tiny hands.
(Mary the Mother, she bowed her head:
"I am weary with riding," was all she said.)

The Palm-tree grew in the desert;
And she lifted her lofty crown:
"Queen am I of the golden sands.
Never my head bends down!"
("Bend" said the Little One! "Give us shade;
Bend thy crown!" And the palm obeyed.)

* * * * *

Mary the Mother had lived her years,
And she sat in her house alone;
And 'twas Oh for a sight of her Holy Son!
Ever her heart made moan.
But His angel came, and he said: "Be calm!
Thy Son has sent thee this holy palm!"

Like stars of the morning
On leaf and on stem
The palm-branch shone
Like a diadem!
And when Mary the Mother had closed her eyes
The palm went with her to Paradise.



The Madonna of the Rose Garden, by Botticelli

HIS MOTHER

I wonder, when Christ's mother leaned
Above her sleeping Child,
She said: The angels talk with Him,
When in His dreams He smiled.
Is this the reason why to-day
That's just what earthly mothers say?
I wonder if when Jesus fell
She kissed the place to make it well?
Perhaps He never suffered harm
Within the shelter of Her arm;
But yet we read,—it seems to me,—
He suffered just the same as we.

And so I think how sweet it was
To one who loved Him best,
To sob His little troubles out
Held close on Mary's breast;
To tell the story of the day
The while she kissed His tears away!
Oh, think how blessed Mary sweet
Would kiss those little hands and feet!
When weary with the day He slept
What tender vigil there she kept!
I'm sure God's holy angels smiled
When Mary watched her sleeping Child!

THE LEGEND OF THE ASPEN TREE

Sweet Mary with her little Son
Set forth from Bethlehem's gate,
And every little wayside flower
Observed their princely state.
And all the way from Bethlehem
The trees bent down to worship them.
The aspen only, it is said,
Refused to bow her stately head.

One look the little Christ-Child gave
Of anger and of grief;
And straight the aspen bent her head
And shook in stem and leaf.
Still for her pride the aspen grieves,
And, quivering, shakes her shining leaves,
That look she never can forget,
And so the aspen trembles yet.

THE LEGEND OF THE EDELWEISS

There came a friar to my cottage door,
And a tiny flower in his hand he bore;
It was plucked afar, from the snow and the ice,—
Men called it the beautiful edelweiss;
The purest blossom in all the land,
For it came straight down from Our Lady's hand.
Know you the legend? The words are sweet;
Listen, my children, while I repeat.
This is the story the good friar told,
As I drew him in from the wind and the cold.

Our Lady spins in the heart of the Sun:
White, white are the skeins that her hands have
 spun;
For her lambs are pastured in Paradise,
Their eyes like the stars of the edelweiss.
Her hands grew weary, her wheel fell fast,
And a bit of the wool through the ether passed.
And so I found in the snow and the ice
This dainty bloom of the edelweiss.
Fresh and fair from Our Lady's hand,
O snow-white bloom from the mystic land!

AN OLD-TIME LEGEND

Sweet is the legend of that old-time day,
When fair Boy Jesus modeled birds in clay;
And all the lads, with shouts of boyish glee
Came flocking near, the little birds to see.
Beneath His fingers wondrously they grew;
Soft breathed He on them, and afar they flew!
O wondrous story! So I think some day
The dear Lord will give wings to us, His clay!



Christ Child, by Murillo

THE HOLY TREE

O Mother Mary, strong and true,
What bitter thoughts are thine
The while thou holdest on thy knee
That little Child divine?

There's a white cloud of blossoms on the thorn,
(I can see the drops of crimson on His brow!)
And I kiss the little dimples in His feet
(Oh I kiss the cruel nail-prints even now!)

There's a green tree a-growing in the wood,
And the little birds are singing far and free
(But it's bitter fruit—it's bearing in my heart!
I can see my Son a hanging on the tree!)

The Lord has blessed thy growing, O thou tree!
As thou liftest up thy branches to the sky,
On thy bosom shall my Son be lifted up.
(O my Son, whose endless Kingdom is on high!)

Bend thy branches at His coming, holy tree!
At His blessed feet O bend thy leafy crest,
For the little Lord of Heaven, this is He!
(O lie still my little baby on my breast!)

Thou canst reach thine arms to Heaven, blessed
tree,
Thou hast neither spot nor blemish, branch or
root!

There's a green tree a-growing in the wood—
 (O the bitter, bitter burden of its fruit!)

I am thinking of the crown upon His brow,
 (O the thorn is full of blossoms snowy-white!)
And I kiss the silken halo of His hair,
 For my King is just my baby for to-night!

A LEGEND OF THE ROBIN

There is a legend—sweet the story runs—
How a little bird came down,
And strove on the cruel cross to pluck
The thorns from the Saviour's crown;
How it plucked and plucked with its little beak
Till its strength was well-nigh spent;
And over its breast, by the thorns deep-pierced
Its own blood coursing went.
And the Savior opened His weary eyes,
And He said: O brave little heart,
Thou hast eased a pang of my suffering
And acted a blessed part:
Hencetoward, ruddy thy breast shall be,
O brave little sprite of the air!
And the loving heart of a little bird
Shall rest in My sheltering care!

THE MOSS ROSE

Away in the depth of the forest,
All moist with the kiss of the dew,
A carpet of moss, green and tender,
In sweetest humility grew.

But none ever dreamed of its beauty,
No traveller paused on his way,
But gaily pushed on to the open,
Where bloomed the first blossoms of May.

* * * * *

There came through the heart of the forest
A Man who was weary and worn;
All-holy and sad was His visage,
His feet they were blistered and torn.

He felt the soft coolness beneath them,
And He said: "Little friend, understand,
Who giveth her best to another,
Shall herself take a gift from God's hand.

And the little Moss blushed in the shadow,
And out of her heart grew a flower;
For so came the Moss Rose at even,
And so is she called from that hour.

“Ah, little Moss Rose,” said the Master,
“Go forth in humility sweet!
But ages shall know of your mission
Who have kissed the pale Nazarene’s feet.”

BARTOLOMMEO'S VISION

Bartolommeo in his narrow cell
Dreamed heavenly dreams, and waked to dream
again.

"Bartolommeo wake! It is not well
To sleep by day," said all his bretheren.
"Go, Brother, to thy place, the place of prayer,
And paint for us thy holy visions there."

Bartolommeo painted, sitting on a stone;
Above and all around, his heavenly visions shone.
No monk came near him; only through his cell
The light from one small window on his painting
fell.

But as he labored, though night followed night,
That little room with glory grew alight;
So the monk's vision in this place of prayer
Could cast a heavenly brightness everywhere.
The Blessed Mother came and stood for him;
For very love of her, the young monk's eyes grew
dim.

For him the Holy Child gave smile for smile.
Bartolommeo prayed and fasted, painting all the
while.

At length he called his Brothers. "I have dreamed,"
said he;

"Come all my Brothers to my narrow cell and see!"
The good monks came. Each fell upon his face.
"The Lord Himself," said one, "has glorified the
place!"

Praised be Our Lady, whose most gracious ways
Shall crown our house for all the coming days!"
She stood before them in that place of prayer,
A radiant nimbus in her shining hair;
And in her arms she held the Holy Child,
Who looked upon the kneeling monks and smiled,
His cheek to hers. (O radiant Mother blest,
Who held the Holy Child upon her breast!)
He stretched His arms and blessed them, it is said,
While each gray Brother bent his reverent head.

The cell is standing. Seek it if you will:
Mother and Child are smiling at you still.
Go, dream your dreams; to one alone is given
To bring to earth a radiant dream of Heaven.

GUARDIAN ANGELS

An angel smiled this happy morn :
That hour a little child was born,
With silken hair and starry eyes,—
A little wanderer from the skies,
A little spirit free from guile ;
And, oh, she had the angel's smile !

God sends an angel now and then
To touch the sinful hearts of men ;
A child, perhaps, in mortal guise,
With winsome face and starry eyes.
(Some times, alas ! with eyes grown dim,
He calls His angel back to Him.)

God, give me grace, whate'er betide,
To know the Angel at my side !
To say, wherever I may be :
"God's angel guardian walks with me."



Guardian Angels, by Botticelli

THE BLESSED MOTHER

In serene celestial beauty,
I have been so often told,
Mother Mary, radiant Mary
Smiles upon us as of old;
Smiles as once upon her Child
Mother Mary always smiled.
Oh, to know the love and joy
Jesus knew as Mary's Boy!
Yet I know that since that day
Mothers smile the selfsame way.
Type of all the love to be
Mary's child-love seems to me!
Best of every earthly good
Blessed Mary's motherhood!

A LEGEND OF ALL SOULS DAY

O blessèd Son upon the cruel Cross,
(Low hangs His head on His breast!)
To whom wilt Thou give the last drop of Thy
 blood,
Who hast saved Mankind with the rest?
And the Savior answered: To Mary sweet,
That her tears may be dried, as she stands at my
 feet.

But Our Lady answered: Not so, my Son;
Thou hast suffered the bitterer part:
No less (ah, no less!) can Thine own Mother bear
The pangs of all Motherhood's heart!
Tho' deeper the pain than the depth of the sea
Give not the last drop of Thy heart's blood to me!

O holy Son, may that last drop be given
To souls that suffer yet for sins unshriven!
Grant them one day Thy blessed face to see:
So shall Thy last best gift be given to me!

* * * * * * *

And so by Mary's grace was given
One day of joy to the souls unshriven!

A PRAYER

Mother benign,
With thy beauty divine,
In pity look down on these children of thine!
Queen of the Angels,
And Star of the Sea;
Lady of Sorrows,
Their comforter be!
Thou who hast held the dear Christ on thy breast,
Hear our petition, O Mother most blest!
We are the mothers who sorrow like thee:
Guide thou our children, O Star of the Sea!

ST. FRANCIS AND THE BIRDS

There is an ancient story—

I have read the quaint old words,—
Of how the blest St. Francis came
And preached to the wayside birds.

Around his feet they gathered,
Down dropped each little head;
St. Francis made the Sign of the Cross,
And these were the words he said:

“Oh, come, my friends, draw near me,—
Come every fluttering bird!
For ye are my little sisters.
Now hearken unto God’s word.

“Praise God for all His goodness:
He has given you home and nest;
Praise Him for air and sunshine,
And the plumage over your breast.

“He has given you wings and freedom.—
All praise to Him doth belong.
But, best of all of His giving,
He has given the gift of song.

“Then sing, O sing little sisters!
And hearken well to my words:
Praise God that here in the treetops
He has made a home for His birds.

“He has given you food and raiment,—
All praise to Him doth belong.
But, best of all, little sisters,
He has given the gift of song.”

The good Saint ended his preaching,
And he blessed them on head and on breast;
And they flew to the north and the southward,
And they flew to the east and the west.

All over God's world they are singing:
“All praise to God doth belong!
He has given us wings and freedom,
But, best, He has given us song!”

NOW I LAY ME

Now I lay me down to sleep.
(Closer, Death, to thee I creep!)
So I prayed in days gone by;
So I pray when Death draws nigh:
Now I lay me down to sleep,
God, His little child will keep!

Now I lay me—God has kept
Watch above me while I slept!
Earth has been a goodlier place
For the shining of His face!
Should I die before I wake,
God His little child will take!

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